



DePaul University
Via Sapiientiae

Napoleon Translations

French Program

1-1-2011

Anniversary of the Death of Empress Josephine

Ana Grahovac

Emily Kettell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/napoleon>

Recommended Citation

Grahovac, Ana and Kettell, Emily. (2011) Anniversary of the Death of Empress Josephine.
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/napoleon/14>

This Translation is brought to you for free and open access by the French Program at Via Sapiientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Napoleon Translations by an authorized administrator of Via Sapiientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

ANNIVERSARY

OF THE DEATH OF EMPRESS JOSEPHINE BY MISS M.A. LE NORMAND¹

Author of *The Prophetic Memories of a Sibyl*
Translated by Ana Grahovac and Emily Kettell

*O mors! Quam amara est memoria tua
homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis!*

Exceeding sorrow
Consumeth my sad heart!
Because to-morrow
We must depart.
Now is exceeding sorrow
All my part!²
Eccles. 41

PARIS,

Author's residence, 5 rue de Tournon, faubourg, Saint Germain.
And in her bookstore,
1 rue du Petit-Lion-Saint-Sulpice,
1815.

¹ TR- Miss Marie-Ann Adélaïde Le Normand (1768-1843) started her career as a fortune teller for the British Royal Family. She then moved to Paris and used tarot cards and astrology to tell the fortunes of Robespierre, Marat, and *Napoleon* and *Josephine Bonaparte*. She predicted that one day *Napoleon* would become Emperor of France. Source: Buckland, Raymond, *The Fortune Telling Book: The Encyclopedia of Divination and Soothsaying*, (Visible Ink Press, 2003).

² TR-Parrott, Thomas Marc, Willard Thorp. *Poetry of the Transition, 1850-1914* (Oxford University Press, 1932).

Translators' Introduction:

Josephine de Beauharnais was born June 23, 1763 and died May 29, 1814 of pneumonia. She was married to Napoleon Bonaparte from May 18, 1804 to January 10, 1810. During Napoleon's reign, she was known as Empress, but they divorced in 1810 because she did not bear him any children.

The author of this text celebrates all the good deeds Josephine did during her life. According to this text Josephine was loved by the French people for all of her benevolent deeds and empathy for the lower classes. The author portrays her as the Mother of all of France.

ANNIVERSARY

OF THE DEATH

OF EMPRESS JOSEPHINE

This tutelary angel is therefore no longer,
She who watched over France and was its gem.
The angel is no longer, she has left the Earth.
But in our hearts, she leaves a monumental impression.

It is my weak voice that today tries to bring back the memory of *Josephine*, and the truth will not have to be ashamed of the just praises that will comprise my story. In my *Souvenirs*,³ I dared to chronicle the virtues of this woman which fortune made so very famous at a moment when she seemed universally forgotten. I will bring back those who make the effort to read my work to this painful time when the Heavens tore her from us. Oh! If only they could help me toss some flowers onto the tomb of a mortal, regretted with such good reason by all of those who knew her well enough to appreciate the rare qualities that nature had left her.

Why must we mix tears with the pleasures of admiration? Sure! Why isn't she entitled to our praises, even in death? *Josephine's* career was too limited. The Heavens which had lavished her with all of these gifts wanted to limit the enjoyment of them with too much rigor. Since the change that took place unexpectedly in her husband's fortune, a secret worry seemed to continually warn her of her upcoming end and put a limit to her days at the age when humans fully enjoy energy, maturity, and experience. The seeds of death that developed so rapidly in her heart could not weaken her courage, and the more she felt the approaching end of her mortal life, the more she hastened to mark the end of her career with actions worthy of the nobility that had sprouted in her excellent heart. Her last words expressed her wishes for the happiness of France. Her last moment was signaled by a kind deed.

Oh Josephine! A woman like you could only have been formed by nature at its purest. Your privileged status was entirely nature's work. It is from nature that you inherited this keen sensibility in which all of the qualities that moved it are reflected. This delicate tact, these just and fine views, this sense of conventions, this exquisite taste that

³ *Prophetic Memories of a Sibyl on the Secret Causes of Her Arrest*. December 11, 1809. Volume 8°, longer than 600 pages, ornated with an engraving. Price: 7 francs 50 cents and 9 francs by mail. Author's residence, 5 rue de Tournon.

seems to be to genius what reason is to instinct. If it be true, however, that instinct is more often the motive for our actions, than reason the guide.

August Shadow! Oh! Without a doubt a hand more skilled than mine is needed to recount your great and genuine actions. Oh! Come, then, to my aid, all of you who have participated in her kind deeds! Come to my aid, you who, like me, were close enough to observe and judge her. Oh! Repeat and stress the sadness of the truth! *Josephine* lived in an era and in the midst of a nation where all was led by enthusiasm. She was fortunate in her tranquil and earnest journey to be constantly guided by reason, placed on a stage where one attracts attention, where one craves the preeminence of her position over and over again, she waits for whatever destiny has in store for her, and she fulfills it with this natural modesty that disconcerts the indiscreet and jealous rivalry.

The fate of France called her husband to the head of our army. He was noticed as soon as he took his first steps. She often shared his noble fatigues and knew even to moderate the impulses of his bellicose personality. The enthusiasm was thus universal among all ranks of soldiers when *Josephine* followed *Napoleon*. The generosity of her sentiments and the kindness of her soul caused her to be worshipped in everyone's hearts.

Alas! She often told me even if war is necessary and legitimate, it is no less deplorable.⁴

She thus inquired from the generals if the peasants were not being trampled on by the soldiers. She encouraged them to contain the soldiers and to protect the others. The love and the gratitude of all were the only riches that she appeared eager to possess.

The sentiments that she inspired were a true cult on the part of all those whom she reached.

Her constant purpose was to effectively use the influence she had over her husband's mind. Was it necessary to support a reasonable request, to make known a hidden merit, to obtain an uncertain pardon, to give good impressions of a fidelity that had become suspect, to validate a service, to mitigate a fault so as to make it excusable, and to give a salutary opinion? She was always ready to seek out the justice, attention, or benevolence of her husband. Similar in the way that these rivers wind their streams with majesty, watering and making fecund the sterile earth, crossing in their flow before carrying their customary tribute to the ocean.

Above all, she possessed the talent of doubling the price of her good deed by the admirable grace that she put towards distributing it. Such are the characteristics of glory belonging to the likable virtues and talents that inspire them. Such were those of *Josephine*.

Oh! If we could summon the shadows of the tomb where more than a generation remains buried forever, it would be *Josephine* who should be the one to speak and evoke after herself, a portrait of the best of women.

The soul of *Josephine* was tender, expansive and noble, as was her physiognomy.

Her generous heart did not seek fame, obliging others was her dominant passion, and to satisfy it, she did not need witnesses. She only needed the natural movements of

⁴ "Fortunate are the people that no dissension agitates, who have not experienced the setbacks of fortune and who live in abundance of everything! But more fortunate are those who have suffered and know how to make good of the bad. The wars have torn apart their hearts only to regenerate themselves and make their name famous by their enlightened views and by their virtues." (Page 253 of *Prophetic Memories*).

her heart, always disposed to produce not only acts of kindness, but also to spread her benevolent influence through all the actions of her life.

Her sensibility obliged her incessantly to pour out into the hearts of her friends. She was naturally loving, and as she shared with vivacity the pains and pleasures of others, she also felt the same need of reciprocal communication.

She despised the subterfuge of deceit, but she knew how to use all the delicate arrangements that take their source in goodness. Her frankness did not consist of confiding imprudently and haphazardly, but in cautiously stating what she thought. Several times, it occurred to her to promise that which she could not always deliver, but her natural goodness could never refuse anything.

The pleasure of relieving great misfortunes was the greatest satisfaction that she enjoyed in her life. She knew that intercessions from the court were needed. At court, those bereft of good fortune are despised, inexorable envy takes over the powerful, and no pity is given to the weak. One believes, in short, that one is relieving the poor by lessening their oppression.

Often she had reasons and favorable occasions to realize the injustices done to her. Always she sacrificed her resentment, and never wanted to harm, not even those whom she could believe were her enemy, or to say it even better, those envious of her.

And how could she have wanted to harm, she, whose personality was identified with goodness and who, let me borrow some words from the famous *Roman* (a), *did not appear as much as a mortal dame as a deity favoring all the unfortunate?*

And you! City-dwellers, who run in vain after the wild dreams of happiness, hoping to find them in your brilliant circles and scorn the sweet and peaceful pleasures. Go to *Malmaison*⁵ for a while. Come to breathe in a place that delighted a woman, who after having acquired the admiration of Europe due to her rare qualities, received in this same place, and at a moment when all the prestige of a high position had disappeared for her, the sincere homage of the most renowned sovereigns in all of Europe.

She lived comfortably in this pleasant solitude that she had been happy to create and to embellish. All the spheres were taken into account in this project. Liking botany, she gathered in her gardens the rarest and most exotic plants. Her art gallery held the masterpieces of the great masters. A zoo of animals, nearly unknown in Europe, attracted all of the attention. A thousand different birds brought pleasant sounds to the ear with their melodious songs. The enameled prairies and the limpid and gushing waters made you question whether this place was not enchanted, while it really was a marvel of art, erected on a low and marshy terrain.

It is there that she spent the days that followed her abandonment.⁶ It is there that daily and at any time, she would receive the benedictions from the widowed and the orphans. It is there that, having returned to a shrinking circle, she found friends. *Yes, friends: the great have so few of them!*

Oh friendship! Charm of the great souls. You, who alone could justify to our eyes the divine character of the misfortunes that devastate humanity! "Divine friendship," *Josephine* exclaimed, "It is deep within me that I dared to love you! If I have sometimes felt the vivacity of your wishes, it is that I found in the spirit of the beings who were dear

⁵ TR- Malmaison was *Josephine's* residence in the city of Rueil de Malmaison.

⁶ TR- Reference to the divorce between *Napoleon* and *Josephine* in 1810.

to me the reflection of my spirit, in their hearts the reflection of my heart, and even in their faults, the excuse for my faults.”

In retirement, she was continually surrounded by a bustling crowd of people who were curious and prompt in seizing the nuances of her smallest thoughts. She would never let a complaint escape. Like *Esther*,⁷ she groaned more than once about her untimely grandeur. She said to me, “I have made the most difficult sacrifices for my husband. Ah! If only he could be happy!”

She bore this change of fortune with calm and resignation. Her courage during these sad circumstances was truly heroic. All of the French people admired her. But her heart, this heart so good and sensitive, remained until the last moment painfully affected by it.

She sincerely shared the pains of the one she loved; her beautiful soul was troubled by them. If all of the world abandoned him and forgot him, she said, “I myself, will be the only one to follow him, and the island of Elba will become my tomb.”⁸

From that time on, the fatal blow was already dealt. There are wounds that nothing can heal, and those of the heart are unfortunately too often incurable.

It is said that in leaving life, she poured several tears. Oh! What could make them spill, if not friends and aching memories? The end of *Josephine* reminds us only too justly of these words from Bossuet:⁹

“Grandness is a dream, joy, an error, youth, a flower that falls, and health, a deceitful word.”

The rumors of her death resulted in a universal mourning.¹⁰ Every person regretted her and gave free reign to their thoughts. There is a time when one recollects the good and bad qualities of those who have died, and when each person retraces in their own heart the reasons he has to be happy or to complain about them, according to their passions, make his epitaph in their own fashion. But what sincere regrets! What heartfelt praises! What accounts of high public esteem and recognition were given to *Josephine*! Let those whose wishes she would grant or whose complaints she would welcome, offer her all of the *sacrifice of their tears and unction of their prayers*! I seem to still hear the countryside-dwellers cry with a tinge of despair, “Alas, we have all lost our great mother! She has left us forever!”

⁷ TR- Esther refers to a wealthy biblical figure in the *Book of Esther* who made difficult sacrifices to help her people. Like *Josephine*, she was not recognized for her good deeds at the time.

⁸ TR- Reference to *Napoleon* and the island of Elba where he was first exiled to in 1814 for three hundred days. He returned to France on February 26, 1815.

⁹ TR- Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704) was a 17th century bishop, theologian, and esteemed orator in France. His work includes *Politics Derived from Holy Writ*, which is a treatise describing the theory on the divine right of kings. Source: Delamarre L., Brunetière, F. “*Jacques –Benigne Bossuet*” In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02698b.htm/>.

¹⁰ “On the day of the Pentecost, May 29, 1814, I was bringing the blessed bread to my countryside. By an incredible phenomenon, I was told the minute the loss of good *Josephine* occurred. I was proposing, following her reiterated invitation, to visit her the following day. I admit that I am exempt of certain vulgar prejudices. I even believe that our soul, in leaving its terrestrial wrapping, no longer communicates with the mortals. Upon re-taking its first essence it merges in the heart of its God. Anyways, having no certainty, my imagination was troubled, and I returned at a very early hour to Paris, where I heard repeated with sadness: “Alas! *Josephine* is no longer.” (Page 192, *Prophetic Memories*).

A nearly octogenarian *elder*, struck by the deepest pain, kept repeating, “Why should I now refuse to descend into the asylum where the ashes of the dead rest? No, my heart goes out to the tombs, and I desire death since *Josephine* is no longer. She is no longer, she, who supported my poor family. She is no longer, she who brought me back to my children, to my motherland. Henceforth, to whom do I bear my imploring wishes? Who will defend me against my enemies? Cruel tears! The more they run, the more they seem to renew and feed my pain! Ah! Come all of you and spill your tears on her urn.”

In the narrow enclosure of a sepulcher there lies a heart that embraced the vast expanse of the land and sea. How many unfortunate people owe, after even she is no longer, their life to her tears? Let us cry, let us cry. *Josephine* is no longer. She has left this land of despair forever with an untainted memory. And yet, there is hardly anyone *among us who would not want to be able to tear a page of their life*. From the height of her fatal and fragile position, she was hurled like lightning into the eternal night. *Sit transit gloria mundi*.¹¹

Sensitive souls, and nearly always so misfortunate, you who have a continued need for emotion and tender moments, come, come to Ruel.¹² Come to Ruel and contemplate the remains of the one who deserved our respect in the past.

Narrow tomb, last residence of the gods of this Earth, of how many do you reduce the pride? Vain mortal, raise this tombstone!

Here lies a woman, who in her beautiful days, perhaps excited your envy. All of the prestigious vanity of her grandeur disappears with her. Only her accomplishments remain. Her body, as cold as the marble that covers her, is the prey of death. Only her reputation survived her.

Fortunate is the one for whom Heaven’s residents sing hymns of joy at the hour of their passing to the other life. In vain, alas, would the dreadful Terror want to shake its hideous plumes around him? In vain, does weak Friendship soak her bed with bitter tears as if she believed that she could thus bring her back to life? The wise tranquilly close their eyes, and their souls climb to Heaven, like the purest flame.

Thus, the sweet soul of *Josephine* returns to the heart of her god. The moment of her passage to a better life was celebrated by immortal songs and a troop of angels seizing her soul, as pure as the celestial light, accompanies her in triumph to the Heavens.

Ah! If only you could, oh, you woman so universally missed, still communicate with the mortals! May your shadow constantly look after the destiny of France and carry our wishes to the supreme arbiter of this vast universe so that Peace, this daughter of the Heavens, finally goes to live amongst us. So that our beautiful motherland will no longer be tainted by the blood of her children! Ah! May your fortunate star still guide all of the parties! *Angel* of goodness and of generosity, grant us with your positive influence that all of the French form but one a family. This great miracle is possibly reserved for you.

Oh *Josephine*! Your praise has been in my heart for a long time.¹³ It is a true and deeply felt admiration which brings me, not at the foot of your statue (for you don’t have

¹¹ TR- “*So passes away the glory of the world*”. The word “sit” is used in the original document. The word “sic” is the correct one. Source: Merriam Webster Dictionary, (2011). <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sic%20transit%20gloria%20mundi>.

¹²TR- Ruel refers to Pierre de Ruel, Marquis de Beurnonville. He was a count and senator under *Napoleon*. After *Napoleon*’s exile in 1814, he was a member of the provisional government. He was made Marquis and Marshal of France in 1816.

one yet), but at your tomb, where I dare to bring to your ashes the homage that another hand should maybe be presenting to you.

THE END.

¹³ I had promised to publish the *Memories of Josephine* on May 29, the day of the anniversary of her death (See page 248 of *Prophetic Memories*). Different obstacles had surfaced that made it difficult for me to try to make good of my promise, but I wanted at least to offer on this same day to the memory of this angelic woman, the tribute of the eternal sentiments of my gratitude and my pious attachment, by recalling provisionally what I had said about her in my *Prophetic Memories*, published at the end of 1814.

“She was carried to the height of greatness but never abused it. I saw her moved by the fate of unfortunate victims. She wept at remembering the suffering of Queen *Marie-Antoinette*. Often she made me repeat what I had seen, what I had heard, and her heart, painfully affected, let the magnitude of her sensibility be seen by all.”

Josephine had the most just demeanor, a persuasive amenity and charm. Her discernment was exquisite. Her premonitions were never mistaken. Often, she said to me, “Confess that it is a small folly to believe you. And yet it would be an even greater one to doubt what you say.”

She was the benefactress and support of the widow and the orphan. The unfortunate found in her a consoling angel. Who, better than me, knew the goodness of her heart, and the elevation of her soul! She pitied and she honored the archduchess, *Marie-Louise*; she did justice to her eminent qualities. Often in the effusion that gives confidence, she said to me: “If at least he loves her, if he makes her happy, their happiness is sufficient for me.”

A tender mother, she placed her unique bliss in her children. She told me so many times, since her cruel abandon, “What will become of them? What will their destiny be now?”

Good *Josephine*, a God watches over them; He will recompense the virtues of the mother in her children.

She sleeps now the slumber of the just. But, before being admitted in the heart of her own creator, the whole of France and the dignified nobility of Europe had already judged her.
(Page 251 of *Prophetic Memories*).